



Library

**An Editorial Flop Revisited:
Rethinking the Impact of
Murray Bookchin's
Our Synthetic Environment
on its Golden Anniversary**

Juan Diego Pérez Cebada

The first American publication of *Our Synthetic Environment* (hereafter: *OSE*),¹ written by Lewis Herber, a pseudonym of the pioneer of the Environmental movement Murray Bookchin, apparently was coldly received in the U.S. For some, it was a complete flop, especially when compared with the mass popularity of Rachel Carsons' *Silent Spring*, published just a few months later. While *Silent Spring* was a genuine bestseller and it is a common place to recognize that only a few scientific books have had such social influence,² *OSE* seemed to have been forgotten.³ It is interesting to point out that while contemporary critics have emphasized the similarities between them, some reviewers now mark their differences in order to search for an explanation "a posteriori".⁴ In any case, for some

¹ L. Herber, *Our Synthetic Environment*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1962.

² For example, for R. Guha, *Environmentalism. A Global History*, Longman, London 2000, p. 72 no book had had such impact on public opinion since the publication of John Maynard Keynes' *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1937).

³ The Murray's late-life companion and biographer, J. Biehl, *Mumford, Gutkind, Bookchin: The Emergence of Eco-Decentralism*, New Compass Press, Porsgrunn 2011, p. 40, said: "Sadly, these ideas got little attention. *Our Synthetic Environment* and *Crisis in Our Cities* received a few reviews that appreciated the problems he raised but regarded his proposed solutions as impractical".

⁴ Y. Garb, "Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*", in *Dissent*, Fall, New York 1995, pp. 539-546. P.A. McCord, "Divergences on the Left: The Environmentalism of Rachel

authors the cold appraisal of Bookchin's book was the main cause for this oblivion. Y. Garb, for example, states that while *Silent Spring* had massive attention from the media, *OSE* received only two negative short reviews and nothing more. He even doubts if "many of you have heard of its author, Lewis Herber, or remember its title, *Our Synthetic Environment*". Therefore, he concluded that it was an "editorial flop".⁵

This essay defends, however, that even if the general public reception was scarce, the initial influence of the book in intellectual circles, especially outside U.S., was greater than it has been considered. This can be seen in the documentation on the book kept by its English publishing house, Jonathan Cape Ltd (1963).⁶

Furthermore, the ideas that inspired *OSE* were essential to understand Bookchin's later production, and also in the evolution of the Environmental movement and the Green left thought.

From The Problem of Chemicals in Food (1952) to OSE (1962)

The appraisal of *OSE* cannot be understood if its antecedents are not considered. The book had its origin in an article entitled The Problems of Chemicals in Food (1952).⁷ This article was written in a context of

Carson and Murray Bookchin", in *Left History*, 13, 81, 2008, pp. 14-34. M.B. Smith, "Silence, Miss Carson! Science, Gender, and the Reception of *Silent Spring*", in *Feminist Studies*, 27, 3, 2001, pp. 733-754.

⁵ Garb, *Rachel Carson's Silent Spring* cit., p. 539. Bookchin himself thought it was obvious that his book could not compete with *Silent Spring*, "a wonderful job": "Nobody could compete with Rachel's stylistic magic and her great following as an established nature writer" (M. Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left: Interviews and Essays, 1993-1998*, A.K. Press, San Francisco and Edinburgh 1999, p. 54). In the "Introduction" of the second American publication of *OSE* (M. Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, Harper Colophon Books, New York 1974) or in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (M. Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, Ramparts Books, San Francisco 1971, p. 66) Carson's work is openly recognized.

⁶ Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), Reading (U.K.) Special Collections. Jonathan Cape Ltd Archive Fonds. Ms 2446, 1914-1995. Editorial, production, and publicity files series. JC 1961-1989. Correspondence related to the publication of *Our Synthetic Environment* by Lewis Herber file. JC 16/3. 1963. Documentation is divided in two great groups: the report of the reviews received by *OSE* by Durrant's, a press cutting firm and the correspondence of Lasky Associates, Bookchin's literary agent.

⁷ L. Herber, "The Problem of Chemicals in Food", in *Contemporary Issues: A Magazine for a Democracy of Content*, 3, 12, 1952, pp. 206-241.

a growing concern regarding the adverse effects of chemicals on public health. In fact, it was after 1945 that the use of food additives and pesticides (especially DDT) had revolutionized agriculture and that some scientists had started to recognize them as a health hazard. Accordingly, in 1950 a *Committee of the House of Representatives* (the *Delaney Committee*) studied the problem.⁸ The hearings of this Committee were used by M. Bookchin to support his article, a critical work against the industry, the experts and the Federal Government.

The article had been published in *Contemporary Issues: A Magazine for a Democracy of Content* (hereafter: *CI*). The director of this periodical publication was J. Weber, an unorthodox Trotskyist German activist head of a group of leftist revisionists, the *Movement for a Democracy of Content*. This group had international connections, especially in U.K. and Germany, where the sister journal *Dinge der Zeit* was published, and showed an early and original interest in environmental problems. For example, articles on the fluoridation of drinking water, or about the dangers of food irradiation were published in 1950s.⁹ J. Weber in *The Great Utopia*, a reference document for the group published in the same journal, pointed out the necessary relation between capitalism and the destruction of natural resources, and called attention to the dangers of indiscriminate use of chemicals pesticides to public health:

The higher the productive forces are developed and, under the domination of capital, increasingly put to the service of aims of destruction, the more rapidly are the natural sources of wealth exhausted. As long as the profit motive determines economy, the celebrated control of nature on the basis of science remains prob-

⁸ T.R. Dunlap, "Science as a Guide in Regulating Technology: The Case of DDT in the United States", in *Social Studies of Science*, 8, 3, 1978, pp. 265-285. V. Gunter, C.K. Harris, "Noisy Winter: The DDT Controversy in the Years Before Silent Spring", in *Rural Sociology*, 63, 2, 1998, pp. 179-188. D. Pete, *Toxic Drift: Pesticides and Health in the Post-War II*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge 2005, pp. 1-13. C. Bosso, *Pesticides and Politics*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 1987, pp. 71-78. B.S. Wilson, "Legislative History of the Pesticides Residues Amendment of 1954 and the Delaney Clause of the Food Additives Amendment of 1958", in *Regulating Pesticides in Food: The Delaney Paradox*, National Academies Press, Washington DC 1987, pp. 161-173.

⁹ K. Knabb, *Public Secrets. Collected Skirmishes of Ken Knabb*, Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley 2007, pp. 307-308. M. Klerer, "The Fluoridation Experiment", in *Contemporary Issues: A Magazine for a Democracy of Content*, 7, 26, 1956, pp. 119-167. A. Scher, "The Preservation of Foods by Irradiation", in *Contemporary Issues: A Magazine for a Democracy of Content*, 9, 35, 1958, pp. 191-196.

lematical in the highest degree and produces innumerable “unforeseen” effects... It must be regarded as certain that all these factors, but especially the one-sided use of chemical fertilizers, are responsible for the appalling increase of heart maladies (disturbances of the circulation), of cancer and other modern plagues which must be considered in the strictest sense of the word as *production diseases*.¹⁰

The influence of Weber on Bookchin is a matter of controversy. Both authors had worked closely and even Bookchin had recognized sometimes his influence.¹¹ But, while M. van der Linden defended the clear ascendancy of Weber on Bookchin’s thought, J. Biehl stressed his genuine originality. Probably truth lies in the happy medium: in Bookchin’s own words, the preoccupation concerning the ecological problems of capitalism “came to me partly on my own and partly as a member of our group”.¹²

In any case, the inspiration of *The Problem of Chemicals in Food* is clearly Weberian in the analysis of the consequences of American Capitalism, especially in the case of “production diseases” related to the use of pesticides.¹³ Weber himself (under the pseudonym Ernst Zander) later affirmed that Bookchin had disregarded the effects of environmental pollution until he studied the *Delaney Committee* documents. It was then that Bookchin went through a sudden “conversion”:

¹⁰ J. Weber, “The Great Utopia”, in *Contemporary Issues: A Magazine for a Democracy of Content*, 2, 5, 1950, p. 8.

¹¹ For example, in the “Introduction to the First Edition” of *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, Bookchin says: “J. Weber... formulated more than twenty years ago the outlines of the utopian project developed in this book. Moreover, for me he was a living link with all that was vital and libertarian in the great intellectual tradition of German socialism in the pre-Leninist era”.

¹² Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future* cit., p. 5. M. van der Linden, “The Prehistory of Post-Scarcity Anarchism: Josef Weber and the Movement for a Democracy of Content (1947-1964)”, in *Anarchist Studies*, 9, 2001, pp. 127-145. J. Biehl, *Bookchin’s Originality*, 2008 (http://www.communalism.net/index.php?Option=com_content&view=article&id=194:bookchins-originality-a-reply-to-marcel-van-der-linden&catid=84:movement & Itemid=2). A.D. Hyams, *Fifty Years on the Fringe. Murray Bookchin and The American Revolutionary Tradition, 1921-1971*, B.A. Thesis, University of Montana, Missoula 2011, p. 34.

¹³ However, for J. Biehl “I must take exception to calling a critique of capitalism “Weberian” Murray was a Communist and a Trotskyist long before he met Josef Weber. He did not have to learn a critique of capitalism from him”. Personal communication by email.

But it so happened that Herber himself was “converted” to the view of the *Utopia*, when he came in touch with, or his attention was called to, the “Congressional Hearings.” Up to then, he told me last year, he thought that the *Utopia* was on this disputed point “crazy.”¹⁴

However, it was Bookchin who developed a well-grounded critical theory of capitalism from a radical perspective, a socially oriented ecology based on technology as an instrument of real progress: “The greatest difficulties of the past were solved when machines or knowledge of ecology, not synthetic chemicals, were brought to the farm”. Bookchin’s courage to confront at a very difficult time, the end of McCarthyism, not only food industry but the state and the economic system has to be acknowledged.¹⁵

This ground-breaking application of political economy to environmental degradation problems opened a new and promising line of research but “made a modest impact” in U. S.¹⁶ It was a different matter in some European academic circles. Although it was not published in U.K., it had circulation as a manuscript, being even shown to Lady Eve Balfour, pioneer of the Organic Farm movement, but, according to Bookchin, his conclusions were found “horrendous”.¹⁷

The article was translated immediately to German as a book.¹⁸ More precisely, it was Dr. Goetz Öhly’s translation (of the Laboratorium Murana at Murnau) as well as a second article entitled A Follow-Up on the Problems of Chemicals in Food which was to be published in *CI* in 1955 (vid infra), as well as material concerning Germany. The network of contacts of the group *Movement for a Democracy of Content* in Germany facilitated the publication. Weber was member of a German scientific society devoted to the exchange of information and experience

¹⁴ E. Zander, “A Fragment on Chemicals in Food and Other Questions”, in *Contemporary Issues: A Magazine for a Democracy of Content*, 10, 39, 1960, pp. 221. In January 1954 in *Dinge der Zeit*, Bookchin wrote a three page article devoted to “The Great Utopia”. J. Biehl, *A Bibliography of Published Works by Murray Bookchin in Chronological Order, Including Translations*, 1991-2006 (http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bookchin/biehlbiblio.html).

¹⁵ Herber, *The Problem of Chemicals* cit., p. 209. Biehl, *The Murray Bookchin Reader* cit., p. 3.

¹⁶ D. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal*, Pluto Press, London 2008, p. 18.

¹⁷ M. Bookchin, *Murray Bookchin Video Biography 21. Interviews Conducted by Mark Saunders*, 1995 (http://www.spectacle.co.uk/archive_production.php?id=255).

¹⁸ L. Herber, G. Öhly, *Lebensgefährliche ‘Lebensmittel’. Sind unsere Nahrungsmittel noch Lebensmittel?*, Hans Georg Muller, Krailing bei Munchen 1953.

among food experts (*Society for Food Chemistry. Lebensmittelchemische Gesellschaft*). Great Utopia and The Problem of Chemicals in Food had been sent to this society, supposedly to be published. Bookchin's article was published and achieved such a success that the publishing house had to prepare a second edition:

Herber's article was in fact translated and published; and subsequently a second edition was printed, so popular did the pamphlet (which contained material besides this article) prove to be.¹⁹

This work received such appraisal that T. G. Franklin (vid infra), in a review of *OSE* in *Mother Earth* (July, 1963), the *Soil Association* quarterly journal, defended that his article had helped to launch the debate about the chemical in foods in Germany. As a result of this debate an early act was passed in the German Parliament on this important issue, *The Law on Food and Commodities* (1958).

In 1955 Bookchin returned to this question in two articles.²⁰ In A Follow-Up on the Problem of Chemicals in Food he goes in depth into some of the ideas introduced in 1952 and concludes proposing a move towards a "rational society", which was one of the titles initially considered for *OSE*.²¹ This "rational society" was based on the cooperation of small democratic communities that made an efficient use of technology, that is, a "humanistic technology". And even more relevant for us is a second 1955 article, Reply to Letters on Chemicals in Food, since it makes evident the impact of his work in and outside the U.K. Herber and Öhly (1953) stated in the "Introduction" that "The article instigat-

¹⁹ "We are now even nominated as a corresponding member of a German scientific society which holds the view of "chemicals and food" held by my *Utopia* (as far as I'm informed this society received the *Utopia* and has no objection of all, but will publish Herber's article on its own)" (Zander, *A Fragment on Chemicals in Food* cit., p. 221).

²⁰ L. Herber, "A Follow-Up on the Problem of Chemicals in Food", in *Contemporary Issues: A Magazine for a Democracy of Content*, 6, 21, 1955, pp. 51-57. L. Herber, "Reply to Letters on Chemicals in Food", in *Contemporary Issues: A Magazine for a Democracy of Content*, 6, 21, 1955, pp. 74-79.

²¹ This is the opinion of Biehl (*Mumford Gutkind Bookchin* cit., p. 25). However, Bookchin stated in a letter to Knopf publishing house in 1962 that he was preparing a new book under this title: "Now that I am getting out under the pile of work around *Our Synthetic World*, I shall get into the writing stage of *The Rational Society*. This book is completely planned and I now need the time to write it" (MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from M. Bookchin a T. Maschler, June 7, 62).

ed an uproar and led among other things to a speech by Lord Douglas in the British House of Lords”.²² In any case, as the Reply to Letters shows, the article caused a scientific controversy in the U.K. In the editor own words “The article had a very wide response”. Two well-known English specialists, the soil scientist E.W. Russell (University of Oxford) and the chemist J.R. Partington (University of Cambridge), sent critical letters to the journal with a similar argument: it was an interesting and well-informed study about a serious problem, but the British professionals and politicians were confronting it better than in other places. For Herber these letters are the sign of “a specious sense of superiority”.²³ On the other hand, the controversy grew out of the academic circles: the English Sunday newspaper *The Observer* debated his article as a result of a letter to editor sent by Doris Scourt. In this letter, she accused Herber of an extreme anti-Americanism and of using ideological clichés. There were also letters received From Australia and Brazil regarding the article. The expert on nutrition Sir Cedric Stanton Hicks (University of Adelaide) coincided with Herber that it was naïve and dangerous to claim a complete knowledge of the complexities of the environment, as patent in some of the effects of applied technology in the 19th c. Josué de Castro, author of *Geography of Hunger* and chairman of the FAO from 1952 to 1956, stated that the possible consequences of chemicals on health “serve to aggravate the general problem of world-wide hunger”.

Members of the *Movement for a Democracy of Content* discussed the article also. For example, in 1960, J. Weber (under the pseudonym of E. Zander) goes over some of the reviews of his article Great Utopia and that of Bookchin’s in an essay published in *CI*. Despite the ideological affinity of the group, the opinions in some articles by P. MacDougal, under the pseudonym of Asa E. Bain and Stephen D. Banner,²⁴ were

²² Van der Linden, *The Prehistory of Post-Scarcity* cit., p. 135. However, I have not found specific references to Herber or his article in any of Lord Douglas of Barloch’ speeches in the Hansard of the House of Lords debate between 1952 and 1953 (<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1952>; <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1953>). Some years later, *Mother Earth* published a special number on pesticides (July 1959) together with an essay by Lord Douglas of Barloch entitled *Mass-Spraying of Pesticides: A Growing Menace to Human Health* (E. Gill, “The Early Soil Association’s Campaign against Pesticides”, in *Mother Earth*, Autumn, 2010).

²³ Herber, *Reply to Letters on Chemicals* cit., p. 75.

²⁴ Van der Linden, *The Prehistory of Post-Scarcity* cit., p. 140.

very negative. It is significant that MacDougal uses arguments later repeated in other *OSE* reviews. Thus, he calls Weber and Bookchin “faddist and crackpots” and accuses them of being biased and lacking scientific grounds in this subject.²⁵

Bookchin extended his interests to the problems of urbanization in *The Limits of City*,²⁶ a first version of a book under the same title to be published fourteen years later.²⁷ The article consisted in a historical, sociological and political study of the city, influenced by L. Mumford and H. Pirenne, among others. According to Bookchin, capitalism had ended with the organic whole formed by the countryside and the city. The absolute dominance of the bourgeois city not only had radically changed traditional ways of life but threatened to destroy it. Limits had been surpassed in the modern metropolis, such as Los Angeles or New York, as their serious problems shown: pollution, water supply, public health, shortages in housing, social discrimination, etc. There was only one radical solution to this problem: to create small autonomous truly democratic communities, ruled by rationality and the application of technology adapted to true human needs. Thus, the article bears connection to *The Problem of Chemicals in Food and A Follow-Up...*, and introduces some of the key topics discussed later in *OSE*.

OSE and the Critics

1. The American Reviewers

In 1962 and 1963, respectively, M. Bookchin signed two contracts with Alfred A. Knopf in New York, a “publisher’s Publisher” and Jonathan Cape in London to publish *OSE*.²⁸ But, as some authors

²⁵ Zander, *A Fragment on Chemicals* cit.

²⁶ L. Herber, “The Limits of the City”, in *Contemporary Issues: A Magazine for a Democracy of Content*, 10, 39, 1960, pp. 35-68. It’s an “Abridged version” (Biehl, *A Bibliography of Published* cit.) of four other former unpublished works entitled “Introduction,” “Land and City,” “The Rise of the Bourgeois City,” and “The Limits of the Bourgeois City”. For J. Biehl, “It was a long article, intended for publication in CI, but the group disapproved it because of the length and the extensive historical material. See my forthcoming biography.” Personal communication by email.

²⁷ M. Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, Harper & Row, New York 1974.

²⁸ Id., *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future* cit., p. 54. In 1974 Bookchin published a new paperback edition (M. Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, Harper Colophon Books, New York 1974).

point out, the book has had a cool appraisal on the part of the U.S.' critics. This can be seen in J. Osmundsen's review in the *New York Times Book Review* (May 19, 1963). Osmundsen described Bookchin as one of the "back to the nature boys" and says that his book expressed "Nice sentiments, only impossible". Despite this unfavorable opinion, Osmundsen recognized two positive things: it had set out a complete perspective of the problem and raised awareness.²⁹

But, influential intellectuals, such as the chemist T.L. Rettger, the microbiologist R. Dubos or the ornithologist W. Vogt, wrote good reviews. And it is very significant that the three authors compare *OSE* to *Silent Spring*. Rettger, managing editor of *Chemical Engineering News*, published an article in the journal entitled Danger about us (1962), which was very appreciated by Bookchin.³⁰ Dubos³¹ emphasized the pioneer role of this "two semipopular and extensively documented books on environmental pollution...soon followed by a flood of articles and other books on environmental pollution". Finally, W. Vogt in *Natural History* (January 1963), concludes his large review of Bookchin and Carson's books stating:

These books cannot be adequately discussed in such limited space. But I should like to urge every reader; if you have time for but two books next year, read these; if only one, read one of them.³²

Favorable reviews were published also in two classical conservationist journals, *Audubon Magazine* and *Sierra Club Bulletin*. Bookchin considered that the editor of the first publication, J. Vosburgh, had written

²⁹ "Neither the best book of this sort that one could hope for, nor as bad as many that have been written, this one tackles the full range of this problem... And this is the best that can be said for a book such as Lewis Herber's. It does sound the alarm", say Osmundsen.

³⁰ In general, Bookchin says that *Chemical Engineering* "has given the work a large amount of coverage" (MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from M. Bookchin to T. Maschler, February 27, 1963).

³¹ R. Dubos, *Man Adapting*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1965, p. 196. The influence of Dubos is recognized by Bookchin in his book: "On the whole, however, Dubos has performed a notable service in focusing attention on the relationship between human fitness and social development" (Herber, *Our Synthetic Environment* cit., p. 139).

³² In the correspondence between the Bookchin's literary agent and the representative of Jonathan Cape, they discuss this review (MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from B. Lasky to T. Maschler, January 7, 1963).

one of the two very best reviews of his book – W. Vogt’s review being the other.³³ R.D.B. had made a short reference to *OSE* in the *Sierra Club Bulletin*. C. Cottan, President of the *National Park Association*, alluded appreciatively to the book also in this same journal in a review about *Silent Spring*. Finally, D. Butcher, editor of the *National Park Magazine* and *National Wildlands News* and former Executive Secretary of the *National Parks Association*, describes *OSE* as a “masterful book”.³⁴

On the other hand, the “Acknowledgments” of *OSE* as well as Jonathan Cape Ltd documents show that the original version of the book had been sent to several experts such as the neuropsychiatrist Joseph Meiers, the mathematician Jack Schwartz (a *CI* member), the physicist John M. Fowler, Francis E. Ray (Cancer Research Laboratory, University of Florida) and Alex Scher (author of *The Preservation of Foods by Irradiation* and a *CI* member). There is a special reference in the “Acknowledgments” to Margaret Nice, the famous ornithologist, and to F.J. Schlink, Director of world pioneering organization *Consumers’ Research*. The English E.C. Large (Plant Pathology Laboratory) and W. Albrecht, one of greatest soil scientist and author of the book introduction, had also given their opinion about *OSE*.³⁵ In general, as Bookchin’s literary agent, B. Lasky, states “Those who have already commented have been extremely complimentary and helpful”.³⁶

Two other foremost authorities in the modern Environmental movement, Lewis Mumford and Barry Commoner, had also been sent the book for checking. The first had exerted an early influence on

³³ J. Vosburgh, “Staff Reviews: Our Synthetic Environment”, in *Audubon Magazine*, Sep.-Oct. 1962 (MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from M. Bookchin to T. Maschler, April 5, 1963).

³⁴ M. Hazlett, “‘Woman vs. Man vs. Bugs’: Gender and Popular Ecology in Early Reactions to *Silent Spring*”, in *Environmental History*, 9, 4, 2004, pp. 701-729. C. Cottan, “A Noisy Reaction to *Silent Spring*”, in *Sierra Club Bulletin*, January 1963, pp. 4-5, 14-15. D. Butcher, “Wasteland or Eden”, in *Teachers College Record*, 64, 4, 1963, p. 270.

³⁵ For Large: “My personal reaction to this book as an ordinary reader can’t matter much” (MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from E.C. Large to W. Howard, director of Jonathan Cape Ltd. January 21, 1962). For Albrecht “His emphasis on the importance of conforming to the basic ecological patterns of the natural world is both timely and necessary” (Herber, *Our Synthetic Environment* cit., p. xii).

³⁶ MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from B. Lasky a R. Slater, Jonathan Cape Ltd. August 15, 1961.

Bookchin's thought:³⁷ in the "Introduction" of *OSE* he thanked him "for reading my discussion of urban life". Even if later he would declare that "Although he certainly had my admiration, he was not my guru".³⁸ In 1961 he sent chapter Six ("Radiation and human health") to Barry Commoner, author of *Closing Circle* (1971). In a letter he acknowledged the influence of his works on atomic energy dangers, particularly an article in *Student Life* (December 19, 1958) and his contributions to the *St. Louis Committee for Nuclear Information*. Commoner shared with Bookchin the urgent need to make people aware of the risk of environmental problems to public health.³⁹

2. Critics outside U.S.

Jonathan Cape Ltd, his English publishing house (1963),⁴⁰ had hired Durrant's, a press cutting firm, to prepare a report on references to the book in newspapers and periodical publications both in the U. K. and the Commonwealth.⁴¹ The publishing house wanted to know, for economic reasons, what had been the book's appraisal both in U.K., its main market, and in the Commonwealth, its natural area of influence.

As the report clearly showed, the reviews had been written in very diverse media: literary and scientific journals, national newspapers, local press and some tabloids. London media were the most interested and made ample reference to the book in the first quarter of 1963. The book's appraisal had been good and, sometimes, excellent. Finally, the book had news coverage in several Commonwealth countries.

It is true that the review in the *Times Literary Supplement* (February 15, 1963) was dismissive. In the article *Too Much Science*, which was unsigned (a common practice until 1974) it was stated that the book had

³⁷ Biehl, *Mumford, Gutkind, Bookchin* cit. McCord, *Divergences on the Left* cit., p. 23.

³⁸ Apparently, he had known Mumford in a conference at the University of Pennsylvania in 1972. But, Bookchin explained that "Back in the mid-1950s, in fact, Mumford sent me an encouraging response to my leaflet 'Stop the Bomb', and in the early 1970s, when I applied for a grant from the Rabinowitz Foundation, he, Marcuse, and René Dubos provided me with letters of commendation". About the relation between both authors, vid. Bookchin (*Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future* cit., p. 254).

³⁹ M. Egan, *Barry Commoner and the Science of Survival: The Remaking of American Environmentalism*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 217-218.

⁴⁰ L. Herber, *Our Synthetic Environment*, Jonathan Cape, London 1963.

⁴¹ MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Report of the reviews received by *OSE* by Durrant's (s.p.).

had a limited impact because it was repetitive and clumsy. Moreover, the notes were badly arranged and the bibliography was unsatisfactory. The author had tried to make a definitive and ambitious study of the negative influence of science. But his arguments were very weak and the facts too controversial. These faults could have been forgiven if the author had presented some coherent and well-funded ideas. But conclusions such as the need to defend a balance between man and the environment were utopian. For this reason, the article recommended the author to tackle this serious problem in the future with more realism and less ambition.

The rest of London press was more favorable. The opinions ranged from the more or less detached to the most appreciative. Among the later, the literary and politic weekly *Time and Tide* (January 17, 1963), specialized in literary talents, published a review which synthesized the contents of the book and highlighted the intention to show all the negatives consequences of modern science for public health and the environment.

P. Philips review, in the monthly literary journal *Books and Bookmen* (March, 1963), deals with some alarming examples of bad use of chemicals in the US industry with an obvious conclusion: such chemicals could have disastrous effects on human health. No country can be considered free of the disturbing problems exposed in the book. Not the British people, particularly when 4,000 people had died during the “The Great Smog” (1952), the worst air pollution episode in the country.

Two similar arguments were defended in the journal *Scene* (February 23, 1963): the book is a “good journalistic account” of the dangers of “progress”, and even though the examples presented are Americans, the problem is universal.

Scientific journals also devoted their attention to the book. For the weekly *Pharmaceutical Journal* (July 27, 1963), the official journal of the *Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain*, when feelings and prejudices are put before scientific principles the result is the loss of objectivity, a flagrant example being R. Carson’s *Silent Spring*. L. Herber (or M. Bookchin) had done something similar, but “he has more justification because he does not write as a scientific”. In any case, the problem of chemical in foods is a serious and complex scientific question. For this reason, the author’s naive and vague opinions about technology and the economic system are completely unacceptable. Books that set out definitive solutions to complex problems, according to the editor of this journal, must be ignored.

Pioneer publications such as London *Mother Earth*, the *Soil Asso-*

ciation quarterly journal, or Manchester's *Smokeless Air*, *The National Smoke Abatement Society* quarterly journal, also reviewed the book. T.G. Franklin wrote a long three page article (Evolution in Reverse?) in *Mother Earth* (July, 1963) in which he carefully examines the contents of Bookchin's book. Obviously, the main argument is the dangers of synthetic chemical pesticides but it goes beyond by dealing with very important contemporary problems like atmospheric or water pollution, the increase of heart maladies, cancer and other diseases suffered by city dwellers, the influence of irradiation on health, etc. In fact, the book focuses on human health as an ecological issue. For Franklin, the author, an expert in this subject, sets out the information with clarity, concision and realism in order to build a general theory about the relationship between the man and the environment. For those reasons, this is one of the most important books of our times.

The Assault on the Environment is a joint book review of *Silent Spring* and *OSE* that came out in *Smokeless Air* (summer 1963). Both books, written with clarity and forcefulness, deal with the same problem: the negative influence of insecticides. But, in fact, Bookchin's book does not limit itself to that influence, but studies specific pollution problems, social, industrial and legal aspects of public health or the advantages of political decentralization. In spite of the diversity and complexity of contents, it is a well arranged book. For this reasons he recommended it as a thoughtful read.

OSE was also reviewed in three influential weeklies: *The Economist*, *The Sunday Times* and *Sunday Citizen*. Casandra in the Cornfields (*The Economist*, February 23, 1963) analyzes Carson and Bookchin's books. When *Silent Spring* was released in U.S., this newspaper considered that Rachel Carson had exaggerated. In fact, for a lot of critics, this problem could not happen in UK. But, just some months later, they had to change their mind. Carson and Bookchin, two "latter-day Jeremiahs", don't want to return to a virginal nature or to ban the insecticides. On the contrary, their proposals are very reasonable: they want a deep and objective research about their negative effects on health and environment.

Jonathan Cape particularly appreciated the review published by C. Connolly in *The Sunday Times*, the historic national Sunday broadsheet newspaper, entitled Death in the Salad Bowl (February 15, 1963).⁴² For

⁴² "I am particularly pleased with the Connolly review" (MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from T. Daschler to M. Bookchin, March 8, 1963).

Connolly, Carson and Bookchin's books raised public awareness about a fundamental problem in modern society, the toxicity of chemicals used in the agriculture. Both authors described the "most terrifying document" about this problem. The two authors complement each other and both write as ecologists, Bookchin from the point of view of a journalist, and Carson from that the biologist perspective. But, whereas Carson studies exclusively the consequences of chemicals for nature, Bookchin centers on the effects on nature and humans. The chapters devoted to the phenomenon of the appearance of new diseases, and its relation with the growing use of chemicals in food, pollution, radiation or other urban problems are, for Connolly, very lucid and painful.

In the tabloid *Sunday Citizen* C. Timaeus wrote an article (Always Monday Morning, January 20, 1963) on *OSE*. For this journalist, Bookchin proposes a "pretty horrible reading" about the reasons (ignorance, greed, apathy) of the industry to spread toxic residues for the public health. Following the aforementioned opinion of *The Economist*, Timaeus considers that this author defends a rational use of the science and technology in order to achieve a harmonic balance between man and the environment.

The traditional British local press paid particular attention to the book also: at least seven newspapers reviewed it. From the pages of *Evening Argus* (Brighton, January 14, 1963) R. Grierson affirmed that the book was well written and its conclusions came from a good account of historical and contemporary evidences. Bookchin had made a superb description of the negative influence of man's activity on the American environment, but this was a universal problem. Therefore, this is a book "which every responsible adult could profit by." F. Bicknell, in the *Yorkshire Post* (Leeds, January 31, 1963) in a review entitled Dangers in the Soil stresses the book's valuable bibliography and its non-technical language. Bicknell particularly emphasizes that the exposition of ideas not is biased, as it is usually the case in this type of literature. For its subject matter and easy reading, this is a book suitable for all. Some days before (January 19, 1963), the *Yorkshire Evenings*, from Leeds also, said that the book presented a wide range of problems well related, based on a large research and exposed in a clear and plain language.

T.G. Franklin repeated his review in the Lancashire's newspaper *St. Helen & District Reporter*. In Talking Point (April 4, 1964) he points out that Carson's book isn't the only one that draws attention to the potential threats posed by new pesticides, focusing primarily on DDT, others

books such as *OSE* had done so. As he had done in the article published in *Mother Earth*, Franklin states: "I have no hesitation in saying that Herber's book is one of the most important works issued since the war". On the other hand, P. Trippe (*Birmingham Post*, March 19, 1963) in *Scientists Mature and Immature* considers the book too much passionate and irritating. The subject is very important but there are others books and authors more qualified to write about it. And he cannot agree with an intellectual that has suggested that science cannot offer answers to the serious problems of food in the world, particularly, in emergent nations.

One more concise reference to the book appears in *East Kent Times* (March 15, 1963). This newspaper recommends those readers concerned with the problems of pollution and public health to consult this book, because there is an adequate account of this question. Finally, the *South-ern Evening Echo* (Southampton, February 2, 1963) repeats already used arguments: Herber isn't a "back to the nature faddist", because he doesn't reject science; although information basically pertains U.S., the problem could affect all western nations; the main contribution of this work is raising the public opinion awareness of health issues related to the indiscriminate use of chemicals, urban growth, or pollution.

The book had also favorable reviews outside U.K., in some of the main newspapers in Ireland, South Africa, Australia or Pakistan. In the article published in the Dublin *Evening Herald* (February 22, 1963), *Alarm Bells about Food*, it is pointed out that Bookchin shows how the chemical industry manipulates science. The documentation about the alterations of natural cycles caused by the massive application of chemical additives, pesticides and such, is really startling, and should make readers pay more attention to food composition.

It is noteworthy the attention received by the book in South African mass media. The interest of the critics could be attributed, besides the influence of Jonathan Cape⁴³, to the wide circle of contacts of the South African activist members of the London group *Movement for a Democracy of Content*.⁴⁴ In any case, three newspapers and one radio station

⁴³ "Please, note that, now that the Union of South Africa is no longer part of the British Commonwealth, we have stipulated it as part of our exclusive territory" (MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from T. Maschler to B. Lasky, April 18, 1961).

⁴⁴ Van der Leyden, *The Prehistory of Post-Scarcity* cit., p. 134. B. Hiron, "The Trotskyist Groups in South Africa. Encyclopedia of Trotskyism On-Line", in *Revolutionary History*, 4, 4, 1993.

included reviews. The more succinct of these references was published in the newspaper *Pretoria News* (February 17, 1963) just acknowledging receipt of *OSE*. *The Cape Times* (February 11, 1963), a newspaper committed to human rights and the working class, includes a more extensive review entitled *Perilous Change*. Herber could convincingly expose all the “perilous changes” for public health presented by technology and the urban growth. The fact that the book used a correct and moderate language makes it even more disturbing. This book is addressed to a wide audience, but it is especially useful for physicians and other public health professionals.

In another monthly South African publication, *Discovery* (February, 1963), a review stressed that the book demonstrated that the indiscriminate use of science is producing a wide range of menaces to humans. And this warning had to be taken into account. The book is very important, furthermore, because it is general interest book written in a clear language. At the same time, it has sufficient notes and bibliography to satisfy specialists.

In South Africa Herber’s book received coverage in the public radio station *South Africa Broadcasting*. March 3, 1963 at 10 PM the critic Alan Lennox-Short was invited to a weekly book talk named “What are you Reading?” to review, among other books, *OSE*. For the critic, it was a “significant and thought provoking book” that studies the harmful consequences on public health of the “deification” of science and of urban growth. The mortality caused by serious pollution conflicts as the “London Smog” (1952), the rising of heart diseases in the young people or the threats posed by the chemicals are good examples. The explosion of the atomic bomb in 1945 is representative of this evil relation between science and health and supposes a point of no return.

Finally, Lennox-Short stresses the plain language of the book that makes it an easy reading for the layman, whereas the technical questions are limited to the appendixes. For this reasons, he recommends a book marked by a “rational humanism”, because the questions presented are of general interest, although all scientists would probably not like them.

Two Pakistan and Australian periodical publications paid attention also to the book. For the *Pakistan Journal of Scientific and Industrial Research* (January, 1963) the author presents an extensive catalogue of the environmental hazards present in modern societies, while using a clear language and taking into account ample documentation from diverse

academic disciplines as a book addressed to a wider audience. One of the main Australian newspapers, the *Morning Herald* from Sidney (May 25, 1963), published an article entitled, Progress Can Kill. Its author, M. Dick, states that the book is “badly arranged” and offers too much incoherent information. Compared to *Silent Spring*, the book is “clumsy” but, despite these faults, a reading of both books demonstrates a very serious problem of our time, the effects of chemical insecticides. And the author shows that this isn’t only an American question: Australians share this problem with U.S. and other Western countries. It must be read and debated to be aware of the powerful vested interests supporting these harmful activities. Individual responsibility must be taken to face the truth courageously.

*Bookchin, the Nature’s Prophet*⁴⁵

The careful preparation of *OSE* (1962) by Murray Bookchin (aka Lewis Herber) and the “extremely complimentary and helpful”⁴⁶ comments of experts consulted by the publishing house and the author (among others Lewis Mumford or Barry Commoner) seemed to announce a brilliant future for this original book. In fact, Bookchin had been working on the topic for more than 10 years. Despite the fact that he was an autodidact and that he came from a small group in the American revisionist left, he was already a well known author in certain intellectual circles in the 50s, specially outside U.S. This is shown in the interest expressed in his work by renowned personalities such as Josué de Castro, Chairman of the FAO, Sir Cedric Stanton Hicks, expert on nutrition (University of Adelaide), E.W. Russell, soil scientist (University of Oxford), or J.R. Partington, chemist (University of Cambridge). The book was backed by A. Cameron, an important editor, and was published in two major editorial companies in U.S. (Alfred A. Knopf) and U.K. (Jonathan Cape). However, the great expectations placed on the book were soon to be frustrated. As a matter of fact, book sales were poor, as the author himself recognized when he was informed that only 680 copies had been sold in the first

⁴⁵ This title is taken from J. Kovel, A. Rudy, *Bookchin, Nature’s Prophet*, CNS/CPE, Santa Cruz, CA 1996.

⁴⁶ MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from B. Lasky a R. Slater, Jonathan Cape Ltd., August 15, 1961.

months in U.K.⁴⁷ Based on these figures and two unfavorable reviews in the *New York Times Book Reviews* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, for some authors *OSE* was an “editorial flop”. And this is specially the case if it is compared with the extraordinary editorial success of *Silent Spring*, by R. Carson, written six months later.⁴⁸

This article contends that this point of view has to be reconsidered. It is true that Bookchin was never a mass author, as Carson was to become, but he was an original thinker that exerted his influence on selected American and European academic circles. The reception of the book, in and outside U.S., was good, in spite of the negative criticism in *The Times* and in *The New York Times*. Moreover, as it will be stressed later, the book had a profound impact in the Environmental movement and in the Green left wing in particular. After 50 years, *OSE* attracts again the attention of researchers. The initial good reception of the book and its subsequent influence explain that, as Bookchin himself defended later, the book cannot be considered at all an “editorial flop”.

Initially, the author, who always defended his opera prima, explained the different appraisal of *Silent Spring* and *OSE* with a specious “conspiracy theory” against his book on the part of political and industrial interest. Later, he resorted to a more consistent argument: *OSE*, “had sold reasonably well, mainly with the scientific community I may say, but less so among the public”. The main cause of the interest of intellectuals and the oblivion of general readers was that the book offered a more extensive interpretation of the dangers of pesticides than *Silent Spring*.⁴⁹ In fact, some contemporary criticism comparing both books share the opinion about the comprehensive nature of *OSE*, as current specialists have noted.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ “The sale of *Our Synthetic Environment* is a bit disappointing”, said Bookchin (MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from M. Bookchin to T. Daschler, May 4, 1963 and from T. Daschler to M. Bookchin, August 3, 1963).

⁴⁸ It is true that the book was initially ignored, but, paradoxically, the publication of *Silent Spring* must have favored its recognition. That is J.W. Hedgpeth’s opinion: “It was received with indifference until the appearance of *Silent Spring*, when it was considered in train and resurrected for the same defamatory reviews given to Carson’s book”. (J.W. Hedgpeth “Man and Nature: Controversy and Philosophy”, in *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, 61, 1, 1986, p. 56).

⁴⁹ Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future* cit., p. 54.

⁵⁰ Y. Garb, “Change and Continuity in Environmental World-View: The Politics of Nature in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*”, in *Minding Nature: The Philosophers of Ecology*, D. Macauley (ed.), Guilford, New York 1996, p. 246. McCord, *Divergences*

In fact, while R. Carson centered his study on the effects of pesticides, Bookchin paid attention to a broader array of environmental problems with an impact on public health (chemicals, erosion, atmospheric and water pollution, radiation, waste, etc). *OSE* was one of the first books to adopt this perspective, as it has been recognized by relevant intellectuals in the 60s such R. Dubos or W. Voght. As it has been stated, the majority of reviewers stressed Bookchin's role as the harbinger of widespread environmental awareness. Thus, T.G. Franklin (*Mother Earth*- July, 1963- and *St. Helen & District Reporter*, April 4, 1964) considers *OSE* one of the most important books of its time. The connection with *Silent Spring* and the pioneer nature of the book has been repeatedly pointed out by specialists since the 70s⁵¹ and is today relevant again⁵². Furthermore, the nature of his study of environmental threats becomes a "scientific bridge" to build a new social theory⁵³ and is a "call for social change".⁵⁴

OSE really marks a transition in his thought and even in his literary style. As recommended by his American publishing house, he "loosened up" the language in order to achieve a wider audience.⁵⁵ He became more "pragmatic and moderate...humanist and urbanist" and his theory on tackling the challenge of environment evolved into an optimistic point of view.⁵⁶ But, more importantly, he moved from his initial Marxism to

on the Left cit., p. 23. Hedgpeth, *Man and Nature: Controversy and Philosophy* cit., p. 56. S. Fox, *The American Conservation Movement*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1981, p. 292. J. Biehl (ed.) *The Murray Bookchin Reader*, Cassell, London 1997, p. 6. D. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal*, Plautopress, London p. 17.

⁵¹ For example in E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful (Economic as if People Mattered)*, Blond and Briggs, London 1973, pp. 93-96. Fox, *The American Conservation Movement* cit., p. 292. R. Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, Island Press, Washington DC 2005, pp. 127-129. R. Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1989, pp. 164-165. V. Ferkiss, *Nature, Technology and Society. Cultural Roots of the Current Environmental Crisis*, New York University Press, New York/London 1993, pp. 173-176. R. Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach*, State University of New York, Albany 1992, p. 9.

⁵² J. Newman (ed.), *Green Ethics and Philosophy: An A-to-Z Guide*, Sage publications, Los Angeles 2011, pp. 34-36. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* cit., p. 5.

⁵³ McCord, *Divergences on the Left* cit., p. 15.

⁵⁴ Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future* cit., p. 54.

⁵⁵ MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from B. Lasky to T. Maschler, representative of Jonathan Cape Ltd. November 17, 1962.

⁵⁶ White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* cit., pp. 13 and 23.

Anarchism and Social Ecology: in fact, there is not a single mention to socialism, Marxism or communism in the book.⁵⁷ Moreover, the influence of Mumford or Gutkind in this and his next book, *Crisis in Our Cities* (1965), is more evident than that of Marx.⁵⁸ As he states in a letter to Jonathan Cape,⁵⁹ “My intention, however, has been to write a work on human ecology”,⁶⁰ a field or research closely related to Social Ecology,⁶¹ his great theoretical contribution. The term “Social Ecology” was used by Bookchin for the first time only two years later, in *Ecology and Revolutionary Thought* (1964),⁶² but some of his key ideas were already in *OSE*: the chemicalization of the environment and the dangers of urban growth and technological advances, decentralization, rejection of hierarchies, and, in general, a social perspective of ecology.⁶³

Social Ecology, initiated in *OSE* and developed in his magnum opera *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982), exerted a strong influence on the rising Green movement. Bookchin was not only an intellectual, but an ecologist activist for the most part of his life.⁶⁴ With the members of the Institute for Social Ecology, that he had founded in 1974, he participated in the first initiative to create a Green organization in the

⁵⁷ McCord, *Divergences on the Left* cit., p. 15. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* cit., p. 12. Biehl, *The Bookchin's Originality* cit. For J. Biehl “After CI he was trying to become a journalist, writing in a popular vein, yet still convey radical ideas without using that (to many Americans, frightening) terminology”. Personal Communication by email.

⁵⁸ M. Bookchin, *Crisis in Our Cities*, Prentice-Hall Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1965.

⁵⁹ MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from M. Bookchin to T. Maschler, April 24, 62.

⁶⁰ “A study of the interaction between man and nature” (Herber, *Our Synthetic Environment* cit., p. 202).

⁶¹ “Social ecology is also an interdisciplinary field of academic study that investigates the interrelationship between human social institutions and ecological or environmental issues. It is closely related to human ecology, the area of the biological sciences that deal with the role of human beings in ecosystems” (J. Clark, “A Social Ecology”, in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 8, 3, 1997, p. 3).

⁶² A specific reference to *OSE* is made in this article (L. Herber, “Ecology and Revolutionary Thought”, in *Comment*, 1, 1964).

⁶³ B. Tokar, “On Bookchin's Social Ecology and its Contributions to Social Movements”, in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 19, 1, 2008, p. 51.

⁶⁴ As it is revealed in Jonathan Cape's documentation, at the beginning of the 60s he already was part of antinuclear groups: in 1963 Bookchin was the editor of *Radiation Information*, a journal published by the *Citizen's Committee for Radiation Information* (MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from M. Bookchin to T. Daschler. February 22, 1963).

U.S. in 1984, and promoted and inspired different ecologist groups: the urban ecology movement in the 60s, the antinuclear movement or the defenders of organic food in the 70s and 80s, or more recently the Anti Globalization movement.⁶⁵ However, his theoretical contribution to the American Green left movement is more important. In this sense, R. Eckersley considers him “one of the early pioneers of Green Political Theory”, while for J. O’Connor, Social Ecology is one of the two great currents in left wing American Environmentalism, the other being Commoner’s political economic ecology.⁶⁶ But the repercussion of the book outside US is of particular significance. The analysis of *OSE*’s reviews reveals the enthusiastic reception of the book in Europe and the Commonwealth,⁶⁷ especially in Germany, where Bookchin was to exert a strong influence on the Green movement from the 80s.⁶⁸ But he was also influential in Italy and in U.K.⁶⁹ where he was called by environ-

⁶⁵ B. Tokar, “Murray Bookchin, Visionary Social Theorist, Dies at 85 (Obituary)”, in *Planet Watch* (July 31, 2006). Hyams, *Fifty Years on the Fringe* cit., p. 102.

⁶⁶ Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory* cit., p. 146. J. O’Connor, *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism*, Guilford Press, New York, 1998, pp. 283-285. White (*Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* cit., p. 5) thinks that if Carson is a unquestionable representative of ecocentric thought, Bookchin is a pioneer of political ecology. Compared to Carson, whom he places in the centre-left, McCord considers Bookchin a representative of a “radical environmentalism” that very influential in the American Green left in the 60s.

⁶⁷ The book was subject of review articles by leading newspapers in Ireland (Dublin’s *Evening Herald*) and Australia (Sidney’s *Morning Herald*). A review is also included in the *Pakistan Journal of Scientific and Industrial Research*. Finally, the coverage received in South Africa is remarkable: three written media and the public radio station, the *South African Broadcasting Corporation*, had news concerning the book in 1963. MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Report of the reviews received by *OSE* by Durrant’s (s.p.).

⁶⁸ J. Biehl, *A Short Biography of Murray Bookchin*, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bookchin/bio1.html, 1999. Tokar, *On Bookchin’s Social Ecology* cit., p. 58. A. Light, “Bookchin as/and Social Ecology”, in *Social Ecology after Bookchin*, A. Light (ed.), Guilford Press, New York 1998 pp. 9. J. Kovel, “Negating Boochkin”, in *Ibid.*, p. 29. The article *The Problem of Chemicals in Food* (1952), which originated the book, had been translated as a book to German in 1953 and had a good appraisal in this country. *OSE* was also translated in the 70s (M. Bookchin, *Unsere Synthetische Umwelt*, Eduard Jakobsohn, Berlin 1977).

⁶⁹ In U.K., in spite of the review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, the book had an early and favorable reception in prestigious generalist press, such as *The Economist*, *The Sunday Times* or *Sunday Citizen*. Moreover, E. Linder and S. Greenburgher, two well known New York literary agents, showed interest in obtaining the book rights to make

mental writer David Nicholson-Lord (*The Independent*, June 1, 1992), “the foremost Green philosopher of the age”.⁷⁰

For some authors, in the late 80s his ascendance on the Green movement started to decline: harsh polemics⁷¹ with deep ecologists, romantics, neo-Malthusians, postmodernists or “Green capitalism” and his “sectarism” limited his influence and could even provoke division in the ecologist movement.⁷² His untiring intellectual search and the continuous evolution of his thought (from trotskyism to ecology and anarchism, and then to “communalism” and “libertarian socialism” in the last years) did not certainly contribute to the diffusion of his ideas. As a matter of fact, his final distancing from anarchism, precisely when the Anti Globalization movement renewed libertarian thought, could contribute to his isolation. That is a controversial question though, given the recognition of his work by authors engaged in this movement, such as N. Klein.⁷³

In fact, the coverage of his death in 2006 in English speaking media (*The New York Times*, August 7, 2006; *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 2006; *The Times*, August 10, 2006; *The Guardian*, August 8, 2006; *The Independent*, August 19, 2006, etc.) shows the final and broad recognition of his work, and in particular the originality and excellence of his first book, which is mentioned in all the obituaries. This is the

an Italian edition (MERL, JC 16/3. 1963. Letter from T. Maschler a B. Lasky, (April 24, 1961); from B. Lasky to T. Maschler, May 12, 1961).

⁷⁰ For R. Jacoby, Bookchin was one of the “last American intellectuals”, together with Noam Chomsky or Christopher Lasch, who lived outside academia; For Marshall, he was the most innovating anarchist thinker in the second half of the 20th century, while for Frankel, he was an important representative of post-industrial utopian thought (White, *A Critical Appraisal* cit., p. 5).

⁷¹ To illustrate this: “Beat poet Gary Snyder once complained to the *Los Angeles Times* that Murray ‘writes like a Stalinist thug’” (C. Morse, “Being a Bookchinite”, in *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory 2009*, <http://www.anarchiststudies.org/node/229>). “Evidently Bookchin’s manual of style was, written by Lenin, for the diatribes against his antagonists in this book are as mean-spirited as were Lenin’s against the renegade Kautsky” (A. Wolfe, “Listen, Bookchin (review of *The Ecology of Freedom*)”, in *The Nation*, May 29, 1982). “Probably spent more time battling competing thinkers and tendencies on the left and in the environmental movement than actually elaborating his own ideas” (Morse, *Being a Bookchinite* cit.). “Having spent the last decade of his life mired in various controversies” (White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* cit., p. 181).

⁷² Clark, *A Social Ecology* cit. p. 36. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* cit., p.186. D. Wall, “Prophet Flawed (Obituary)”, in *Weekley Worker*, August 10, 2006.

⁷³ Hyams, *Fifty Years on the Fringe* cit., p. 102.

confirmation of what for more than a decade some researchers, critical to Bookchin's figure for the most part, had made evident: his extensive work (more than 20 books and innumerable articles) translated to 18 languages,⁷⁴ had transcended his contradictory personality.⁷⁵ Current research, as this article, also recovers the first Bookchin, the "visionary" or "prophet"⁷⁶ that had foreseen in *OSE* the close connection between ecological degradation and the social problems inherent to capitalism. For this reason he is considered a link in the "socio ecological tradition" that started with P. Kropotkin or E. Reclus and continued to P. Geddes, L. Mumford or E.A. Gutkind.⁷⁷ In this sense, D. White considers him a "forefather" of political ecology, but also an ecological humanist, a postindustrial visionary and a utopian urbanist.⁷⁸ The vitality of the ideas of this multifaceted thinker are also stressed by A. Hyams⁷⁹ or B. Tokard, who marks eight proposals in Social Ecology that the emerging Environmental movement could today make their own. That is why this "prophetic" and groundbreaking socio ecological interpretation of capitalism, that Bookchin had made 50 years ago, is still valid today: "the corrosive simplification of living ecosystems and the retreat into an increasingly unstable and synthetic world that Murray Bookchin

⁷⁴ Germany, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Greek, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Dutch, Czech, Polish, Hebrew, Turkish, Japanese, Chinese, Korean (Bookchin, *A Bibliography of Published Works by Murray Bookchin* cit.).

⁷⁵ For example, D. Watson, *Beyond Bookchin. Preface for a Future Social Ecology*, Autonomedia, Brooklyn/Detroit 1996. Light, *Social Ecology after Bookchin* cit. Clark, *A Social Ecology* cit. J.A. Clark, C. Martin (eds), *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: The Radical Social Thought of Elisée Reclus*, Lexington Books, Lanham, MD 2004. Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory* cit., pp. 146-159. Tokard, *On Bookchin's Social Ecology* cit., p. 63. A more favorable vision can be found in the quoted works by J. Biehl. She is currently preparing the publication of an exhaustive biography of Bookchin (J. Biehl, forthcoming).

⁷⁶ J. Moore's "Prophets of the New World: Noam Chomsky, Murray Bookchin, and Freddy Perlman", in *Social Anarchism*, 20, 1995, pp. 31-39. Wall, *Prophet Flawed* cit. Kovel, *Negating Bookchin* cit., p. 27. Kovel, Rudy, *Bookchin, Nature's Prophet* cit. McCord, *Divergences on the Left* cit., p. 30. Morse, *Being a Bookchinite* cit.

⁷⁷ Clark, *A Social Ecology* cit. Biehl, *Mumford Gutkind Bookchin* cit. D. Padovan, "Social Morals and Ethics of Nature: From Peter Kropotkin to Murray Bookchin", in *Democracy and Nature*, 3, 3, 1999. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* cit., p. 194.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-196.

⁷⁹ Hyams, *Fifty Years on the Fringe* cit., pp. 102-103.

predicted in the 1960s has evolved from a disturbing future projection to a global reality”.⁸⁰

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to Janet Biehl for reading the first version of this article and for her pertinent suggestions.

⁸⁰ Tokard, *On Bookchin's Social Ecology* cit., pp. 64-66.